



United States Senate

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
“Securing the Border: Building on the Progress Made”
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
March 30, 2011

As Prepared for Delivery

Hearing will come to order. I want to thank our witnesses and everybody else who's here. This is part of a continuing series that we've been doing on this committee on oversight of our border security operations. This one is important because of the range of witnesses before us and the work Mr. Stana and GAO has done. We're going to follow this with two more hearings on the southwest border in which we're going to have some state and local officials in and then Secretary Napolitano will be with us after that.

The question of border security continues to be important to our country in various ways. This morning we began a different series of hearings, taking a look at the institutions of our government created after 9/11 to better protect our country. In and in that case we've done an enormous amount to increase border security in the sense of stopping terrorists and the instruments of terrorism from coming into our country, with some success.

I was struck in the testimony that has been filed for this hearing about the interest in the question of what is border security. One series of definitions comes from the Secure Fence Act in which they list the elements of operational control, with regard to terrorism and its tools. Narcotics and its contraband are obviously quite important when you consider that the FBI said in testimony before this committee that the number one organized crime threat in America today is from Mexican drug cartels.

Obviously the Mexicans say that we're creating a problem for them with guns flowing the other way. Of course probably the most politically sensitive and controversial aspect of border security is the security of not knowing that people are coming into the country illegally.

We have spent a lot of money and time increasing the resources we've devoted to border security. Some numbers the GAO has supplied:

In Fiscal Year 2004, when the Department of Homeland Security first existed, we had 10,500 agents to patrol the land borders. In Fiscal Year 2010 we had double that, 20,000 agents at the land borders.

In Fiscal Year 2004 we had 17,600 agents inspecting travelers at air, land and sea points of entry. That went way up by Fiscal Year 2010.

The expenditures more than doubled, from \$5.9 billion to \$11.9 billion for personnel, infrastructure and technology.

The question we constantly ask is what do we get as a result of these investments and how do we measure the results.

One of the standards that is used a lot is apprehensions and it has an odd and kind of inverse effect that's always struck me as kind of problematic. As the number of agents go up, the apprehensions go down and generally speaking we've felt that tells us there are fewer apprehensions because the number of people trying to cross over illegally has gone down. Although, as others have pointed out, the data is problematic because it tracks events rather than people. So if a person is apprehended more than once a year it's counted more than one time.

At different times in the past decade, the border patrol has cited both increases and decreases in apprehensions as a sign they're more effective. Either they're apprehending a higher percentage of people coming across the border or their operations have reduced flows.

There's a recent RAND report that says "commonly reported border patrol measures, such as numbers of illegal immigrants apprehended or miles of border under effective control, bear only an indirect and uncertain relationship to the border control mission, making them unreliable management tools." So that leads me to want to engage you in seeing if we can find a better way to measure security at the border. In terms of illegal immigration, the common sense measurement would be how many people are trying to come across the border and how many are actually getting in.

This question of border security continues to be important to us in all the ways I've stated—the organized crime threat posed by Mexican drug cartels; the terrible violence in Mexico, some of which has threatened border communities within the United States; and then in terms of illegal immigration, both because when there is a law we have a responsibility to enforce is to the best of our ability, but also in context of the congressional environment. We continue to have the reality of no less than 10 million people who are here as undocumented immigrants and I think there's a widely held conclusion that improving border security is a precondition to coming back and dealing with illegal immigration. Ms. Meissner actually suggested in prepared testimony that maybe it should go the other way that fixing the problem of undocumented immigrants may help us secure the border or better control the flow of illegal immigrants.

It's an important hearing, I thank the witnesses, you come with extraordinary experiences and I welcome your testimony.